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# This Time Tomorrow and Other Painted Stories

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*Virginia Commonwealth University*

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***This Time Tomorrow and Other Painted Stories***

Documentation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts at Virginia Commonwealth  
University.

by

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Richmond, Virginia  
May, 2011

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### **Artist Statement**

My visual vocabulary is drawn from the language of fairytales and dreams and includes animals, birds, tambourines, scrolled railings, clumps of flowers, clocks, bubbles, and people. I include symbols that resonate for me or, through its shape, solve a formal compositional problem. The images are pieced together in a collage-like manner and juxtaposed without regard to real world concerns of place, size, and scale. The resulting stories have a surreal appearance. My goal is to create drawings and paintings that reveal a personal, expressive reality.

## ***This Time Tomorrow and Other Painted Stories***

### **Introduction**

In 2005 I took a painting class offered through the Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts (MIS-IAR) program of Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). I was teaching art, raising a family, and finding it difficult to make time for painting and drawing. With the structure that first class provided I became more productive. The class community provided feedback and stimulus and I felt energized and inspired. The format of the MIS-IAR graduate program, with classes offered when my work day ended, made participation feasible. Achieving my goal of participating in a university program focused on studio art became accessible.

There was very little art offered in high school in Portland, Maine in the 1970's, and no counseling to direct me towards a path of study in college that might have combined my interest in art and the practical desire of my family that I study something that would result in employment. Instead, I attended a liberal arts college and majored in English literature.

In retrospect, this path was no less impractical but perhaps more acceptable than studying studio art. I loved novels, poems, and words, read Shakespeare (1564-1616) and the Bloomsbury writers and artists (early twentieth-century). I paid close attention to Virginia Woolf's (1882–1941) writing, and felt a surge of understanding reading *To the Lighthouse* (1927). While at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts I took as many studio art and art history classes as I could fit into my schedule. The art department was very small but students could take classes at the Worcester Art Museum School. I was attempting abstract painting in the style of Helen Frankenthaler

(1928- ). I graduated from college, and traveled with my husband to Pullman, Washington where I took undergraduate art classes at Washington State University.

In Pullman my view of art was turned upside down. The college art faculty was involved in an approach to art that had strong ties to the artist-faculty at University of California, Davis, California. I had never heard of Wayne Thiebaud (1920-) or Roy de Forest (1920–2007) but these artists and others like them came to Pullman. Through their subject matter and influence I began to understand that art could be rooted in contemporary life. In my East Coast education I had been taught that visual art was serious. These West Coast artists' combination of imagery, humor, words, and commanding technical skills surprised me. Thiebaud's cakes with their vibrating edges of layered color caught my attention. I could see the influences of twentieth-century expressionism in Thiebaud's animated brushwork. I began exposing the layers of paint in my paintings. I copied his subject matter and drew, painted, and sculpted cakes. I was inspired by Thiebaud to search my daily life for imagery to include in my paintings.

The personal mythology of Roy de Forest's dog-populated paintings was at once visually dynamic and silly. I was drawn to the bold colors and pervasive use of pattern of his funky narratives. De Forest's mix of energetic patterning recalled Matisse (1869–1954) and the Fauvist movement. From de Forest I took the idea of visual repetition as a way to hold the viewer's attention.

My growing awareness of West Coast contemporary artwork energized me. These artists offered me a path to combining my literary interest with visual art. I loved how art was made accessible by these artists and I admired their dexterity with line, composition, and color. This inspired me to develop my technical skills in order to

tackle the challenge of creating visually engaging, narrative art. I felt connected to painting in a way I had never felt before.

## **Painting**

To stimulate ideas, compositions, and color schemes I begin by looking at art works by master artists in books and online. For years, I have utilized Max Beckmann's (1884-1950) paintings and drawings to inspire my work and many of his compositions have influenced me. This preliminary process was confirmed by observing that the MIS-IAR faculty, Kurt Godwin and John Figura, brought books and catalogs to our classes and encouraged their perusal. It was doubly validated by instructor John Figura sharing my admiration for Beckmann. Figura spoke of Beckmann as a master artist, appreciated him for his energetic and figurative work, and noted this artist's connections to my aesthetics and methodology. In Beckmann I see much of what I want in my art: forceful presentation, skillful drawing distorted to add expressiveness, and a narrative that is both realistic and dream-like. Studying Max Beckmann's 1948 painting, *Portrait of Perry T. Rathbone*, I conceived my painting *Soap Bubbles and a Peacock Feather* (Appendix, 1). My use of pattern in the wallpaper and use of black outlines in the painting clearly shows Beckmann's influence. Like Beckmann's figure in *Portrait of Perry T. Rathbone* I positioned my subject, a young girl in a casual pose, turning at the start of the stairway and clasping the newel post. I feel a sense of recognition when viewing Beckmann's art because of his narrative approach.

With music playing, I have the drive to begin the process of making small sketches, taking photographs, searching the Internet for imagery. I keep a cabinet

drawer, sketchbook, and file folders filled with these small sketches to use as visual references. I use this preliminary drawing and research to prepare for creating to-scale sketches to initiate a large painting.

The canvas I work on is cut from a roll of pre-ghessoed cotton duck. It is an important part of my aesthetic that my work is developed unstretched and exhibited in the same format. Tacked on the wall, the painting is flat and does not project but instead becomes part of the wall, joins it in flatness. Nailed to the wall, the canvas can accept aggressive brush work and its stability encourages me to use my entire arm and body in the making of paint marks.

With canvas tacked to my studio wall, I make written notes in my sketchbooks, lyrics from the music I am listening to, word lists to brainstorm the imagery and title, and names of acrylic colors to employ. I research these word lists online, look up definitions and synonyms and antonyms, and search for words that will work as images and link to my personal symbology. These expansive vocabulary lists give rise to small sketches in my moleskin. In turn, these visual notations direct me to image searches. For example, when working on *Little Creatures* (Appendix, 2), I kept a list of words that related to “daughter” and searched songs and art books for visual and symbolic connections. I found the Talking Head’s CD, *Little Creatures* (1985), and that became my title. Through this same exploratory language game around the word daughter, “puppies” was added to my *Little Creatures* word list. I was led to a Paul Gauguin painting, *Still Life with Three Puppies* (1888). A postcard of this artwork is now glued into my sketchbook. A portion of Gauguin’s imagery is included centered on the left edge of this painting as one of the little creatures.



While working in my sketchbook on *Little Creatures*, I reexamined Milton Avery's painting of his daughter, *Girl Writing* (1941). This painting has special significance for me. It was a painting I lingered in front of during my frequent visits to the Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. I admired Avery's painting for its formal qualities, including the light-colored dress of Avery's daughter, March, against the dark background. The painting inspired me to name my daughter, Avery. A postcard reproduction is in my sketchbook. I reproduced it as the image framed by gold that forms a halo behind the main figure's head in *Little Creatures*.

## **Composition**

The images I have collected in the preliminary stages of planning a canvas form a collection that I work from to develop a painting. They are placed together without regard to real world logic. Position is dictated by compositional concerns and I consider movement, overlapping, repetition, and variety in size and shape. Years ago, I saw a photograph of Henri Matisse (1869-1954) working on his collages. I often follow Matisse's example of creating cut-outs by drawing the images to scale and cutting them out. This allows me to tack up the images, moving the cut-outs around until I discover a satisfying arrangement. I can also experiment with unconventional positioning by inverting the sketches. Cropping by using the canvas's edge happens for me effortlessly through repositioning a preliminary drawing. The cut-outs also encourage my experimentation with repetition. I transfer the imagery to canvas and the paper cut-outs are thrown away. In the painting *This Time Tomorrow* (Appendix, 3), images were arranged in this manner. The primitively painted flowers were traced repeatedly from a

paper cut-out, I then used them to create a background pattern. The flowers appear as white on green in the left quadrant of the painting and yellow on dark red in the upper center portion of the canvas. The image of the shoe which I intend the viewer to perceive as moving out of the picture plane on the lower right, the tiger, and magpie were all positioned using cut-outs following experiments with angle and overlapping.

Size and overlapping help to establish a shallow fictive picture plane. The imagery and picture plane in my work is kept shallow with the imagery close to the edge and close to the viewer. In the painting *The Secret Chord* (Appendix, 4), the two entwined figures' lower bodies are cropped by the lower edge of the canvas. This positioning forces the two people up close to the viewer. The small size of the winged figures in the upper left and the flying birds in the lower right establish the embracing people as oversized. The device of creating cut-outs allows me to treat my canvas as a surreal space. The use of cut-outs as a preliminary step in my paintings has led me to incorporate collage in my sketchbooks.

## **Color**

Color was the initial lure to paint. I find color seductive, gorgeous, and difficult to control. However, I have come to understand that without controlling color, paintings lack focus and are difficult to absorb and appreciate. Again, I turn to Henri Matisse and the Fauvist painters who used riotous color, that was emotional rather than descriptive of reality, but were always in command of their palette.

A key lesson I took from Fauvism is the use of a palette that repeats throughout the painting. Another idea that is a feature of Fauvism is the inclusion of colors that are

jarringly bright. The Fauvist palette utilizes complementary colors to heighten the impact but there is order in the management of the color. Repetition throughout the painting of the color palette encourages the viewer's eye to travel the picture surface.

Another lesson learned from scrutinizing the Fauvist paintings is the necessity of attention to the color's value from light to dark. Although the illusion of three-dimensionality is minimized in my work, the use of value is important to give the forms emphasis and clarity. Within my work there is often a sense of shallow space. The use of value underscores the overlapping forms which helps the viewer to perceive the imagery as layered in this shallow space.

The painting *The Juggler* (Appendix, 5) exhibits these concepts learned from the Fauves. Here, color is repeated and used for visual variety and as an attention focusing device. The bright green that is used in the upper left-hand corner for the drapery is repeated below and more towards the center line of the canvas in the pipe protruding from the tiger mask's mouth. This green recurs in the upper right-hand corner of the canvas as the color of the hair of the inverted angels. The angels spread in a mass from the right edge of the canvas towards the left and this leads the viewer's eye back to the green drapery.

### **Narrative and Symbolism**

Inverted angels, a pipe protruding from the tiger mask's mouth, primitive flowers, and a shoe moving out of the picture plane, birds, soap bubbles, a peacock feather, and a gripped tambourine are recurring images in my visual stories. The images come from a number of sources including word lists I begin each new painting with, objects that

have symbolic meaning for me, and images I have scavenged from other artist's work.

My interest in narrative painting connects to my early education in English literature and my continuing appreciation for writing. The artwork of Max Beckman, full of symbolism and allegory, has been a significant guide. Beckmann's *Birds' Hell* (1938) is difficult to initially interpret but is immediately a disturbing painting. The symbolism carries the narrative and is at once emotionally accessible but literally obscure. Through the excitement stirred by brilliant color and a crowded composition, Beckmann holds the viewer's attention although the narrative is ambiguous. My canvases including *Little Creatures* (Appendix, 2), *This Time Tomorrow* (Appendix, 3), and *The Juggler* (Appendix, 5) employ this strategy.

Each of my images has its root in the personal but in placing the image in my paintings I wish it to invite the viewer to ponder its purpose. For example, the image of a hand gripping a tambourine has appeared in my paintings (Appendix, 3 and 4). It is often placed in the upper corner, at an angle pointing down and towards the center of the art work. In my mind the gripped tambourine represents music and its energy. The tambourine's shape reminds me of the sun and so that image has stood in for the sun in the upper corner of my artwork. When I look at that image now, I think of the energy derived from music and from the sun.

Birds, singly, and birds in flocks are visual symbols that I repeatedly use. In the window at the top right of *Little Creatures* I painted a single bird with a scrolled ribbon in its beak. A lone, large bird painted in black and blue is positioned in the upper center of the canvas of *This Time Tomorrow* flying towards the tambourine sun. In the painting *The Juggler*, I used a linoleum block to stamp a flock of birds in the center of the

painting. *The Secret Chord* has a similar flock of birds which I drew with light blue lines of paint in the lower right corner. These birds are based on the magpies which I noted during a trip to South Korea in 1987. Magpies are also featured in the Korean folk art paintings and folk tales I admire. These birds that I incorporate in my art work have come to represent the idea of journey, flight, and the passage of time.

## **Drawing**

Where drawing stops and painting begins isn't clear in my work. I continue to explore definitions of painting and drawing because my paintings are so linear and my drawings have been created on painted surfaces. Edges play an important role in my art. The outlines of images are often chalked first and later emphasized with paint or covered with acrylic matte medium to preserve the chalk. These colorful outlines are another reason to think of the paintings as drawings. Drawing, line, and painting are connected in my work which straddles both categories.

I began working en plein air, setting a goal of creating drawings. En plein air took me out of my comfort zone of working inside in my private space. Deciding to try the familiar I painted the surface of the paper with gesso. The familiarity of the physical, mechanical act of painting the paper's surface with gesso opened a door. I continued to work with both graphite and gesso brush in hand. These paper art works rely on line to create boundaries and set a tone of energy. The initial graphite lines shows through in places. Gestural marks set a pace of energy. There is paint and color and brushstroke. The completed three works comprising the series *Pink, Pink Moon* I consider to be both drawings and paintings because of the combination of the drawn and painted features.

*Pink, Pink Moon* (Appendix, 6) was the initial artwork of the series. Using graphite lines, I added detail to the primitively drawn white flowers that appear in all three panels. Fragments of text written with graphite are allowed to show through the paint. Gestural marks scratched into wet paint with the end of a paint brush, or sgraffito, interrupt the paint. A black, painted outline surrounds portions of the images.

*Gas Meter and Three Birds* (Appendix, 7), the second art work of the series, also reveals graphite lines, text, and sgraffito. Along with painted black outline, images in this panel exhibit the initial drawing I did with pink chalk. These pink lines edge the gas meter's hardware and are repeated in outlines and details on the three small birds.

Taking a second look at *The Secret Chord* (Appendix, 4), there is blurring of the division between painting and drawing. The central figures are colorful and although clearly outlined include painterly marks and gestural brushwork. The images in the four corners relate more closely to drawing because of their reliance on line. This includes the crowd of inverted winged figures, the flock of birds, the large profile of a girl with a pipe in her lips, and the cropped segment of a male leg and shoe.

Drawing as drawing is more obvious within my sketchbooks. These books serve as my sketchbooks, journals, and scrapbooks. Pages have writing, collaged items, painted surfaces, and line drawn with graphite and pen. The sketchbooks of Frida Kahlo (1907-1994) and the journals of photojournalist Dan Eldon (1970-1993), rich with images, textual musings, and ephemera are both significant influences on my sketchbook work. I was surprised to see that Kahlo, an artist that I admired for her surreal compositions painted, wrote, and drew in her sketchbook. Eldon's inventive inclusion of Tabasco bottle labels, photographs, and other collected souvenirs of his life

pointed me in the direction of employing collage.

Seeing pages from these artists' sketchbooks liberated me from considering the sketchbook a rigid repository of preliminary drawings and thumbnail sketches. Rather than a servant for the paintings that would follow the sketchbook became an art form on its own with widened possibilities. My books contain lists of colors and lines from songs, ticket stubs, and postcards purchased from museums. In the two page spread that comprises *Sketchbook (Page 1) and Sketchbook (Page 2)* (Appendix, 8), drawing, writing, and printed imagery are presented with a combination of paint, ink, and graphite. It is the one place I create art that is focused on line above color and brushstroke. Drawing here is not only preparation for painting, it exists here for its own sake.

My drawings and paintings showcase a symbolic visual vocabulary. I have developed these symbols through my examination of favorite master artists, and my own research and assessment of imagery I observe in my daily life. This collection of visual signs allows me to create figurative art work that has personal resonance. I am striving towards a body of work that is less concerned with documenting reality but instead establishes an individual emotional truth.

## **Conclusion**

I see my art work growing. This change is a reflection of the concentration I have been able to give my artwork during my time in the MIS-IAR program. My visual vocabulary has been developed to a point that I have a bank of symbols that ring true for me. I have developed a working method where images are pieced together to

create surreal narratives. Now, with process established, I feel free to experiment with gestural brushwork and a more immediate and spontaneous technique. I am looking forward to expanding on this development.

It is gratifying that I am achieving my goal of completing a degree in studio art. Thanks to the staff and faculty of the VCU MIS-IAR program, my art work has taken a leap forward. I do not believe that alone I could have achieved this growth as an artist. Encouragement from my family and the staff of Arlington Public Schools has kept me going and inspired. I feel that I am poised on a precipice that these past years' work has helped me achieve.



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## Appendix

### List of Images

- Figure 1. *Soap Bubbles and a Peacock Feather*, acrylic on canvas, 54"x38", 2005.
- Figure 2. *Little Creatures*, acrylic on canvas, 54"x38", 2006.
- Figure 3. *This Time Tomorrow*, acrylic on canvas, 38"x54", 2007.
- Figure 4. *The Secret Chord*, acrylic on canvas, 57"x42", 2010.
- Figure 5. *The Juggler*, acrylic on canvas, 38"x54", 2007.
- Figure 6. *Pink, Pink Moon*, acrylic and graphite on paper, 22"x30", 2010.
- Figure 7. *Gas Meter and Three Birds*, acrylic and graphite on paper, 22"x30", 2010.
- Figure 8. *Sketchbook* (Page 1) and *Sketchbook* (Page 2), mixed media on paper, 10"x8" each page, 2010.



Figure 1. *Soap Bubbles and a Peacock Feather*, acrylic on canvas, 54"x38", 2005.



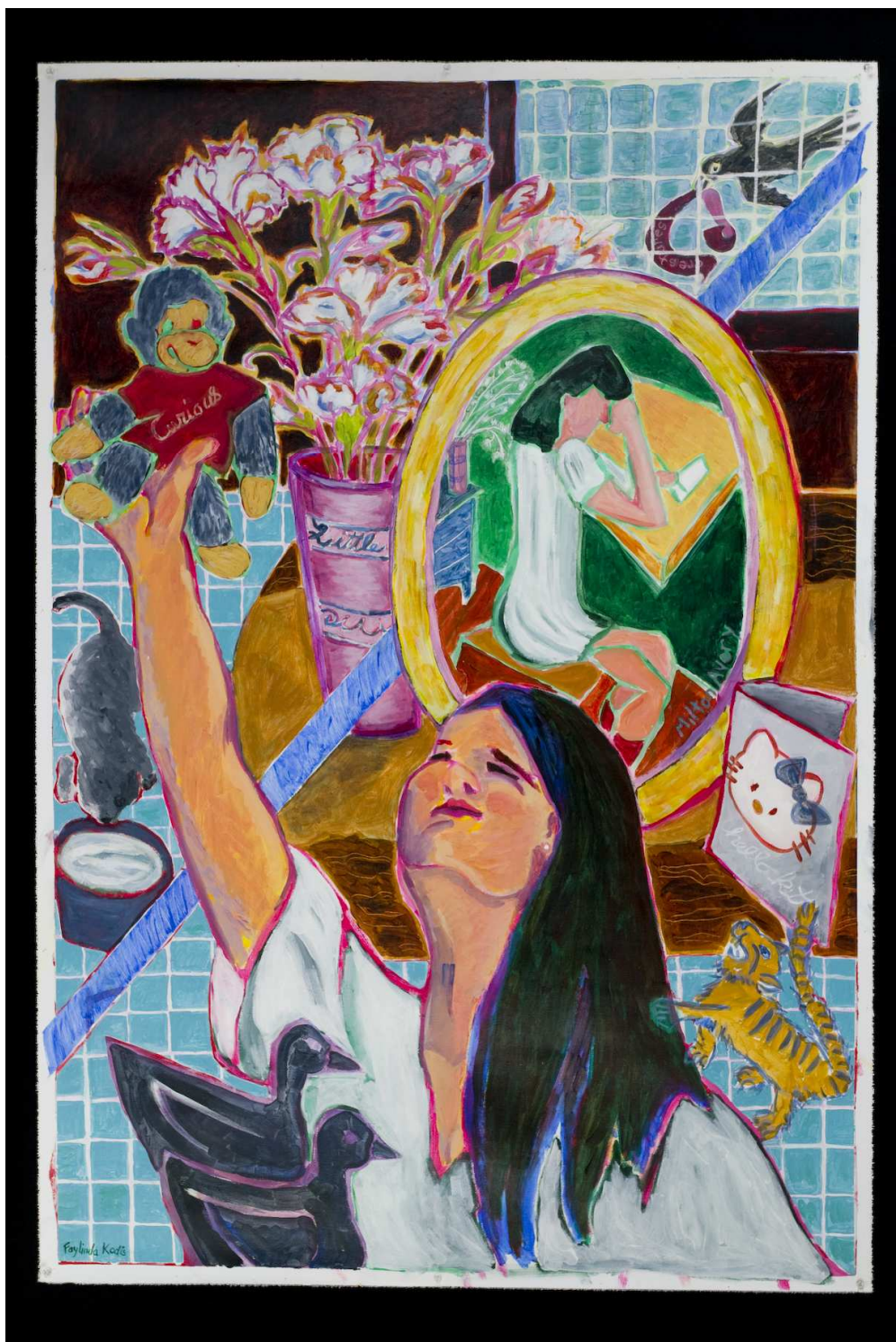


Figure 2. *Little Creatures*, acrylic on canvas, 54"x38", 2006.

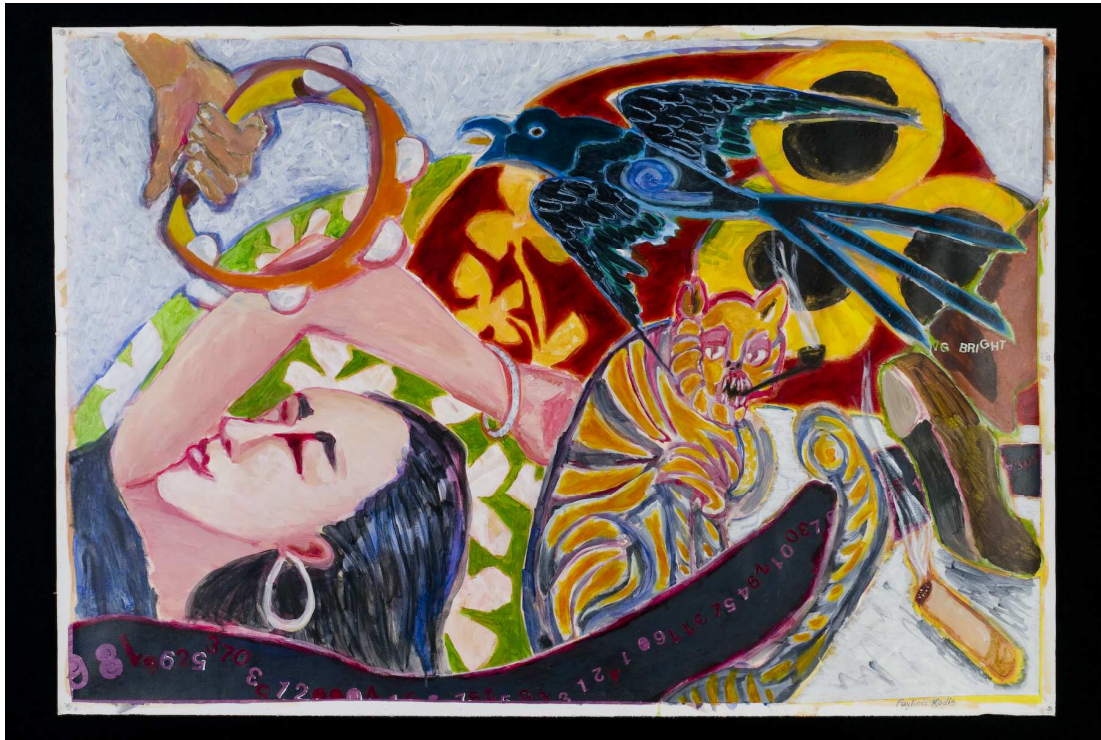


Figure 3. *This Time Tomorrow*, acrylic on canvas, 38"x54", 2007.





Figure 4. *The Secret Chord*, acrylic on canvas, 57"x42", 2010.

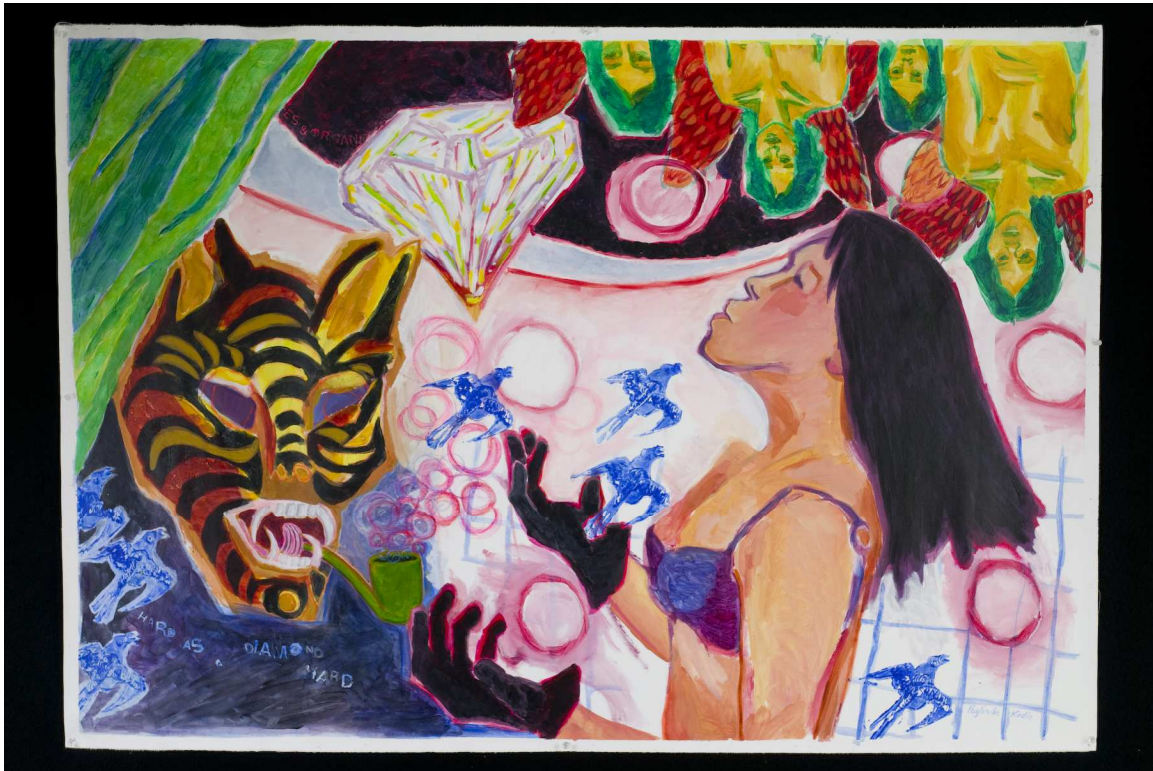


Figure 5. *The Juggler*, acrylic on canvas, 38"x54", 2007.





Figure 6. *Pink, Pink Moon*, acrylic and graphite on paper, 22"x30", 2010.





Figure 7. *Gas Meter and Three Birds*, acrylic and graphite on paper, 22"x30", 2010.



Figure 8. Sketchbook (Page 1) and Sketchbook (Page 2), mixed media on paper, 10"x8" each page, 2010.

## **FAYLINDA KODIS**

### **EDUCATION:**

- 2011 Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA. Specialization: Painting and Drawing.
- 1975 Bachelor of Arts, Clark University, Worcester, MA.

### **OTHER EDUCATION:**

- 2002-2004 Continuing studies in Education, Marymount University, Arlington, VA.
- 1977-1979 Continuing studies in Studio Art, Washington State University, Pullman, WA.

### **TEACHING EXPERIENCE:**

- 2009-pres. Art Teacher, Yorktown High School, Arlington, VA.
- 2003-2009 Art Teacher, Claremont Immersion School, Arlington, VA.
- 2008-2009 County-wide Lead Arts Specialist (elementary level), Arlington Public Schools, Arlington, VA.

### **RELATED EXPERIENCE:**

- 2010 Presenter, Museum and School Partnerships, National Art Education Association National Annual Conference, Baltimore, MD.
- 2008-2010 Teacher Mentor, Claremont Immersion School, Arlington, VA.

### **SELECTED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES:**

- 2008 Role Model Workshop leader, Infinite Inspiration, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC.
- 2008 Contributor, Children Are the Future: Partnerships Between Museums/Cultural Institutions and Schools, Mid-Atlantic Association of Museum Annual Conference, Jersey City, NJ.
- 2007 Workshop Leader, Artists, Books and Creativity, for the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Albuquerque, NM.
- 2007 Panel Participant, Artists, Books and Creativity, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC.
- 2007 Online speaker, Artists, Books and Creativity, National Museum of Women in the Arts, <http://www.artbookscreativity.org/interactive/index.html>, February 2011.

### **AWARDS AND HONORS:**

- 2008-2009 Teacher of the Year, Claremont Immersion School, Arlington, VA.
- 1987 Special Opportunity Award, Alexandria Commission on the Arts, Alexandria, VA.

AWARDS AND HONORS continued:

1987            Commitment to Community Service Award, Alexandria Recreation  
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SELECTED GRANTS:

1998-2008    Teacher Incentive Grant, Virginia Commission for the Arts, Richmond, VA.  
2003-2004    Arlington Community Foundation Grant, Friendship Tile Mural, Claremont  
Immersion School, Arlington, VA.  
2003-2008    Mini-Grant, Arlington Public Schools, Arlington, VA.  
2004, 2006,   Grants for the Arts, Washington Post, Washington, D.C.  
2007  
1995, 1996    Individual Artist Project Grant, Arlington Commission for the Arts,  
Arlington, VA.  
1995,         Artist-In-Education Study Grant, Virginia Commission for the Arts,  
1988-1990    Richmond, VA.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIPS:

2003-pres.    National Education Association  
2003-pres.    Virginia Education Association  
1998-pres.    National Art Education Association

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS:

2011           *This Time Tomorrow*, Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in  
Interdisciplinary Arts Thesis Exhibition, Virginia Commonwealth University,  
Richmond, VA at The Education Center, Arlington, VA.  
2007-2011    Arlington Public Schools Visual Arts Faculty Exhibit annual, The Education  
Center, Arlington, VA.  
2006           *Déjà Vu: A New View*, Arlington Arts Center, Arlington, VA.  
1995           *All Together Now*, Ellipse Arts Center, Arlington, VA.  
1990           *High Contrast*, Richmond International Airport, Washington Project for the  
Arts, Richmond, VA. Curator: Mel Watkins.  
1989           *Beyond Expectations*, Foundry Gallery, Washington, DC.  
1988           *Uncommon Portraits*, The Athenaeum, Alexandria, VA.  
1990           *Local Color*, Arlington Arts Center, Arlington, VA. Curator: Angela Adams.  
1989           *Foundry & Friends Invitational Exhibition*, Foundry Gallery, Washington,  
DC.